

BOOKSHELF | *By Eric Felten*

# No Paycheck, New Plans

## Rebound

By **Martha I. Finney**  
(FT Press, 187 pages, \$16.99)

It's raining pink slips. The newspapers are full of stories of people losing their jobs—at least newspapers that haven't yet gone out of business themselves. Just last week we read about mass layoffs at Caterpillar and Boeing, not to mention various hospitals, charities and school districts around the country. Job fairs are mobbed. I passed a FedEx Office location last week that was advertising "Free Résumé Printing Day."

All of which makes Martha I. Finney's "Rebound: A Proven Plan for Starting Over After Job Loss" a timely offering. A catalog of advice culled from career coaches, employment lawyers and social-networkers, the book is a guide as much for how to handle getting laid off as for how to find another job.

"Rebound" is timely in another way as well. The category killer in the get-a-job bookshelf—"What Color Is Your Parachute?"—could stand to be retired. First published 39 years and 10 million copies ago, the book keeps coming out in annual editions. But with its clumsy charts and checklists, its hokey visualization devices and hollow platitudes—"Job-hunting is not a science; it is an art"—it feels less like a book than the rummage of a community-college guidance counselor. And dusty rummage at that. You can get a sense of the vintage of "What Color Is Your Parachute?" from the fact that it is illustrated here and there with Ziggy cartoons. You can

get a sense of its sloppiness from the fact that, in the 2009 edition of "Parachute," the same Ziggy cartoon runs on page 41 and page 167, without anyone at publisher Ten Speed Press seeming to notice. For that matter, the same Peanuts cartoon appears on page 129 and page 282.

By contrast, "Rebound" is uncluttered, cartoon-free, direct and mercifully brief.

The first half of the book is devoted to the process of getting

laid off—with an emphasis on disciplined, dignified behavior and savvy self-protection. Throwing a tantrum is out. Not only can it get you an unwelcome reputation as a hothead, it could lose you what little you can hope to take away in benefits. Ms. Finney quotes employment lawyer Alan Sklover saying that "I've known circumstances where loud voices have been termed *workplace violence*. Then they have good reason to terminate you, without a severance package."

But grace under being fired doesn't mean total

But grace under being fired doesn't mean total surrender. Ms. Finney offers straightforward and solid advice on what to do when presented with a severance agreement and a pen: "Before you sign a thing . . . don't sign a thing!" A severance package is a legal document, she observes, and it is worth having a lawyer go over it—or at least giving it a careful read yourself out from under the expectant gaze of the nice person from human resources. Ms. Finney notes that, under the Older Workers Benefit Protection Act, anyone 40 or over who gets let go has three weeks to consider the terms of his termination before having to sign anything. Watch out in particular for non-compete clauses that can hobble your ability to make a living.

Alas, Ms. Finney is less compelling on how to find a new job than she is on how to leave the old one. She serves up the standard fare on making a plan and working every possible contact and husbanding financial resources, but the emphasis is on keeping one's spirits up. Fair enough. Even more insidious than the prospect of poverty is the sense of failure that may eat away at a person who has been let go. Ms. Finney presents some basic strategies for depression-avoidance, including such simple tactics as getting out of bed and getting dressed as if for work.

How to handle getting laid off is as important to know as how to find a new job. Temper tantrums are out.

Less helpful are her happy-talk slogans: "Positive thinking leads to creative, solution-oriented thinking." "You may have lost your job, but you haven't lost your reason for being." And downright unhelpful is Ms. Finney's suggestion that one abjure such "stress hormone-inducing substances" as coffee. The last thing an unemployed java junkie needs is to go job-hunting sluggish and glassy-eyed from caffeine deprivation.

There was, once upon a time, the notion that the Internet would make chasing employment a snap. But posting résumés on the Web has only created a fathomless electronic slush pile. The stunt route is always possible, but, sorry, myhusbandneedsajob.com is already taken. Ms. Finney suggests using the Internet as a networking tool, and she recommends LinkedIn. Conceived as a site for making business contacts, LinkedIn, according to Ms. Finney, is the best vehicle for professionals. Maybe so, though other commentators—such as Slate's Farhad Manjoo in a recent article on Internet-aided job-hunting—claim that Facebook works better, perhaps because Facebookers are more actively engaged in their pages.

One part of the Web strategy in "Rebound" strikes me as perverse. Ms. Finney suggests drawing attention to oneself by starting a blog: "Maybe even make it a little controversial," she writes. Be provocative, she says, and "ask some especially prickly questions in your profession and stand back to watch the comments fly." Exactly how many employers will be eager to grant you an interview if they think that it might become material for your blog? Keep in mind that the due diligence of employers now includes Googling you. Better advice might be: Don't commit anything to the Web that you wouldn't want a potential boss to read—and that includes a potential boss 20 years from now.

But if you do manage to get a job offer in this lousy economy, chances are that it will not be your dream job, and chances are that it will not pay what you want. Ms. Finney turned to Richard Shell, the negotiation guru at the Wharton School, for advice on how to handle such an offer: "This is going to be a short chapter," he replied. "Just say yes."

Mr. Felten writes the Journal's weekly "How's Your ink?" column.